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TAGS: [OVIP](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY REPS EXPRESS CONCERN OVER SECURITY,
CORRUPTION AND INSTITUTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Ford, reason 1.4 (B & D)

11. (SBU) Summary: During a lunch with Deputy Secretary Negroponte and WHA Assistant Secretary Shannon, Honduran civil society representatives expressed concern over the country's growing security problems, rampant corruption, and weak democratic institutions. Discussion remained general, however participants pointed to a weak state lacking resources and direction. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Embassy Tegucigalpa hosted a lunch June 4 with three key members of Honduran civil society in honor of the Deputy Secretary and WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon's visit. Invited guests included: Human Rights Commissioner, Dr. Ramon Custodio; Mr. Juan Ferrera, head of the Honduran Anti-Corruption Committee; and Pastor Oswaldo Canales, president of the evangelical Confraternity of Honduras.

Public Security

13. (SBU) Human Rights Commissioner Custodio expressed strong concern over Honduras' critical security situation. He attributed increasing levels of violent crime to the proliferation of organized crime networks, particularly drug cartels. When the Deputy Secretary asked how the transit of drugs was affecting Honduras, it was noted that although Honduras is not a producer of illicit substances, it suffers many negative social and economic impacts of the transit.

14. (C) According to Pastor Canales, 70,000 private security agents have been contracted throughout the country in response to public insecurity. While this buffing up of security has contributed to more arrests, prosecution of law offenders remains low. Custodio opined that a new security law is not needed to address the country's security issues, however, enforcement and implementation of existing laws is essential. (Note: We disagree with Custodio and strongly support the passage of the proposed Organic Police Law which creates a separate Internal Affairs Unit, and requires polygraphs and random drug tests for new officers, among many other improvements. Custodio has long battled the security forces in general following the murder of his daughter in the 1980's. End note)

Corruption

15. (SBU) Ferrera noted that progress in combating corruption continues to be difficult because of the increasingly sophisticated forms in which it exists. He explained that although public consciousness about the ills of corruption had increased, the perception that it is unchallenged remains the same. Citing the case of Hondutel, Ferrera seemed doubtful about the government's true desire to promote greater transparency, and suggested the private sector should become more proactive in demanding this. Corruption within the police and prison systems was discussed, with participants citing the prisons as the place where officials get rich quickest and are then transferred a few months later to give another official a chance. Ferrera also cited problems with road construction concessions and misused public transportation subsidies as examples of how unchecked government actions affects poor Hondurans on a daily basis.

16. (SBU) Speaking on the national Anti-Corruption Committee he leads, Ferrera explained that the Committee's primary role was one of consultation making annual reports to Congress. He admitted the Committee lacked resources to do much more, such as conduct independent investigations or institute preventative measures, which would be most ideal. Honduran representatives also noted that corruption stemmed from the lack of basic training provided to and education required of officials. All agreed with the Deputy Secretary's recommendation regarding the need to professionalize the nation's civil service.

Democratic Institution Building

17. (SBU) Issues of judicial independence and rule of law were raised by Ambassador Ford. All representatives agreed that little had improved in this area even after the adoption of the law on Transparency and Access to Information in 2007, as the members of the committee were chosen purely on the basis of their party affiliation. In particular, Pastor Canales noted that little was being done to reform the Registry of National Persons (RNP) or Ministry of Foreign Affairs which he suggested lack sufficient independence from personal and party interests.

18. (SBU) Pastor Canales charged the GOH with being too passive in creating a strategy to strengthen national institutions and combat poverty stating that he has been "surprised with the amount of improvisation being undertaken by the government." Although his organization has proposed short, medium, and long term goals to the government, he seemed doubtful President Zelaya would implement any national plan so late into his term. (Note: During informal conversations prior to lunch, Honduran participants also agreed that state institutions would continue to be weak so long as public confidence in the individuals responsible for them was low. End note)

This cable was cleared by D staff.
FORD